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LETTER

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

SIR JAMES SPITTAL, LORD PROVOST,

TO THE

MAGISTRATES AND TOWN-COUNCIL
OF EDINBURGH,

ON THE EXPEDIENCY OF CONTINUING

THE CHAIR OF PATHOLOGY

IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.

BY



ROBERT LEWINS, M. D.

FELLOW OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS, EDINBURGH, &C.

EDINBURGH:

JOHN CARFRAE & SON.

1837.

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LETTER

QUALITY STREET, LONDON

July 1837

My Dear Sir

I take the liberty of addressing you on a subject which at present engrosses the attention of the Medical Profession, and particularly of that respectable and influential class who are engaged in teaching the various departments of medical science, within and without the walls of the University.

I was taught at an early period of life by my beloved friends and preceptors, Mr. Keble, that no duty is more imperative on the medical practitioner than that of superintending the education of his pupils; and endeavoured to raise, in as far as it may lie in his power, the standard of the profession; and having mentioned the name of Keble, I may state, as an allusion not unwelcome to the present discussion, that the last time I saw him was within the walls of the College of Physicians, as in the course which at present occupies our attention, and amongst the last public lectures of his life, when he endeavoured to accomplish the object which I could hardly have any doubts as to his success in any degree of instruction. The improvement of our Medical Education, as it is called, to do so, I may as he did, be considered as the duty of those whom I have the pleasure of addressing. I cannot help me here to utter any opinion, but I feel that I am not alone in this.

LETTER, &c.

QUALITY STREET, LEITH,

July 29. 1837.

MY LORD AND GENTLEMEN,

I take the liberty of addressing you on a subject which at present engrosses the attention of the Medical Profession, and particularly of that respectable and influential class who are engaged in teaching the various departments of medical science, within and without the walls of the University.

I was taught at an early period of life, by my late revered friend and preceptor, Dr Kellie, that no duty is more imperative on the medical practitioner than that of superintending the education of his pupils, and endeavouring to raise, in as far as it may lie in his power, the status of the profession; and having mentioned the name of Kellie, I may state, as an affecting fact appertaining to our present discussion, that the last time his voice was raised within the walls of the College of Surgeons, it was in the cause which at present occupies our attention; and amongst the last public efforts of his pen, was an attempt to accomplish the object, which I would rejoice were my humble advice in any degree instrumental in achieving,—the improvement of our *Medical Curriculum*. In endeavouring to do so, I may, as he did, encounter the frowns of those whom I unwillingly offend. For my own part, I quarrel with no man for entertaining opinions on this or on any other subject different from mine. But

I never will compromise my own conscientious belief, nor hesitate to express it in plain terms, and on proper occasions, whether or not it shall be in accordance with that of others, however much I may respect their talents, or defer to their stations.

My Lord, you are of course aware of Dr Thomson's resignation of the Pathological Chair, but your late absence from Edinburgh must have prevented your Lordship from being so fully acquainted, as the other members of the Town-Council, with the discussions and consequences which that resignation has produced. It is part of my present undertaking to endeavour to supply your Lordship with that desideratum ; and, perhaps, the easiest way of accomplishing that object, will be to lay before your Lordship, three communications, in detail, which appeared in the Observer newspaper, of the 11th, 14th and 28th inst., of which I avow myself to be the author.

“ PATHOLOGICAL CHAIR.—We are glad to find that so large a proportion of the Town-Council are disposed, at least, to take into consideration the propriety of abolishing the Chair of Pathology. In a University where there are six months' courses of lectures delivered on the Practice and on the Institutes of Medicine, besides a Professor of Clinical Surgery, and one of the Principles of Surgery, there is no occasion for a distinct Pathological Professor. The creation of that Chair was, as remarked by Treasurer Mac-laren, a job, the perpetration of which has proved a great hardship to the students, who are compelled to attend the class by an academical, or rather by a government enactment. By some it has been considered a matter of regret, that the result of the vote in the Council, in reference to the subject under consideration, precludes that body from obtaining the opinion of the Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons, together with that of the Professors in the University. Little benefit would, perhaps, have resulted from a remit to the College of Physicians, or to the Professors, on the subject. The apathy—or something that is worse—of the College of Surgeons in regard to this matter *was* too well known. At the proper time, that is, when the Chair was called into existence, a party of the surgeons proposed that a respectful remonstrance, in the shape of advice, should be made to the Secretary of State for the Home

Department, (who made the professorship,) and found themselves in a wretched minority. Nine-tenths of their brethren, actuated, it is to be feared, by other than scientific motives, virtually approved of the appointment, or at least acted as if they did. By the vote of the Council on Tuesday last, it appears that they have decided on the continuance of the Chair for the present. In the circumstances of the case, that was perhaps the most judicious course; but its adoption need not prevent the Patrons of the University from reconsidering the whole matter deliberately; and when they have done so, they will doubtless come to the determination, that the wisest course will be to abrogate the present system of teaching *Clinical Medicine*, and to appoint a Professor for the special purpose of conducting that important branch of medical study, whose duty it will naturally be to teach Pathology also*. Such an arrangement would abolish the superfluous Chair as a distinct one; and besides relieving the students of the grievance inflicted on them by the job of 1831, would be a decided improvement on the medical curriculum. Since the above was written, the Town-Council, it appears, at an extraordinary meeting on Friday, rescinded their vote of the previous Tuesday, agreeing to the recommendation of the College Committee, to give Dr Thomson a retiring allowance of L.150 per annum, so that the whole affair is again opened up for further discussion. That Dr Thomson is not entitled to so large a pension—or indeed to any pension—is abundantly evident; but still the Town-Council will perhaps find that the wisest course, after the vote at the meeting where the question was deliberately discussed, would have been to allow that matter to rest, and to have proceeded to appoint a successor. As things stand, we are prepared for a vast deal of turmoil in reference to this Pathological Chair; but the policy of the Patrons of the University is evident, and we have no doubt they will do their duty. Our humble idea of it is, that they should, with as little delay as possible, translate Dr Mackintosh to a Chair in the University, as Professor of Clinical Medicine, who, independent of other powerful claims, has proved himself to be a most zealous cultivator of medical science,

* On further consideration, I am disposed respectfully to advise the appointment of two Clinical Professors.

as well as one of the most successful lecturers of the present age.”—*Observer*, July 11.

“CHAIR OF PATHOLOGY.—A correspondent concerning the Pathological Chair, whose situation and professional knowledge certainly entitle his opinion at least to consideration, has sent us the following remarks on the subject :

“ In our communication, to which a place is given in the *Observer* of Tuesday last, we have said, as things stand, we are prepared for a vast deal of turmoil in regard to this Pathological Chair. Little were we aware that the same newspaper was to contain the proof of our prediction which the communication of the Professors to the Council affords. We forbear to animadvert, in the pages of a newspaper, on the ‘ offer ’ of the Voluntary Professors,—or on the ‘ concurrence in opinion ’ of their six brethren, as that is likely to be done in a more appropriate place ; but would most anxiously entreat the Patrons of our medical school to pause before coming to any conclusion anent the proposal of the Professors. They, in the true spirit of placemen, speak of Dr Thomson’s rights :—his rights, indeed ! Dr Thomson’s appointment was either improper or not ;—if improper,—as the Professors to a man, who were in the University when he was appointed, thought, and as every other impartial person imagined,—what right has he to a retiring allowance ? And with what propriety, we would ask, do these Professors propose to perpetuate the grievance on the students during the lifetime of Dr Thomson, and to take L.150, or upwards, out of their pockets ? For what ? To pension a man for doing, during the enormous period of three or four years, that which they say is unnecessary ! The Professors should be reminded, *inter alia*, that what they call Dr Thomson’s *rights*, are the students’ *wrongs*.

“ We would also inquire if the time of these Voluntaries be so little occupied by their other various duties, as to leave them leisure for the task they propose to impose on themselves ; and whether or not they have delivered an opinion, which is on record, to the effect that it is prejudicial to the interests of science for one individual to lecture on *two* subjects ? If the proposal be accepted, some of them will lecture on three departments of medical science.

“ Should it be found absolutely necessary to pension Dr Thomson, and if no other method can be devised to raise

the money, the Council would certainly do well to ascertain if *one* proper person can be found to do, on the same terms, for the present, that which the *four* Professors propose.

“ We repeat our humble but most earnest solicitation, that the Town-Council will pause before coming to any determination on this important subject.”—*Observer*, July 14.

“ *To the Editor of the Edinburgh Observer.*”

“ CHAIR OF PATHOLOGY.”

“ SIR,—An important point, for which we were anxiously solicitous, in regard to this subject, has been gained, namely, DELAY, the Council, at their meeting of Tuesday last, wisely having come to the determination to do nothing in the matter until the 1st of August. Ample time is thus given for judging of the value of the Professors’ ‘ offer,’ as well as for taking the suggestions of others into consideration. In my communication, which you were pleased to publish in your paper of the 14th instant, with some preliminary remarks of your own calculated to add weight to my humble opinion, I declared myself to be uncompromisingly opposed to the plan of the Medical Professors, as one absurd in principle, and unjust in its practical bearing on the students. Subsequent reflection, and, what is still more to the purpose, extensive opportunity of collecting the sentiments of the most intelligent part of the medical profession, has fully confirmed the soundness of my original opinion,—that it would be highly inexpedient, nay, palpably unjust, in the Town-Council to sanction the arrangement which the Professors have volunteered to make. It is very apparent, that, with a sincere desire to act uprightly, the Council must feel themselves in a perplexing situation. They have, however, the satisfaction to know, that the difficulties by which they are surrounded in regard to this, as well as other matters with which they are nobly struggling, are none of their own creating. But they need not despair:—they have merely to “ be just and fear not.” This brings us to the consideration of a most material part of our subject. If the Professors’ ‘ offer ’ be rejected, how is a retiring allowance to be provided for Dr Thomson? A still more pertinent question should be previously settled,

—Is Dr Thomson really entitled to a retiring allowance? I have formerly answered that question in the negative; and I think any impartial person, who is aware of the state of the case, will readily acquiesce in that opinion. The institution of this Chair was not recommended by the Commissioners appointed to visit the Universities of Scotland, but was called into existence by the Secretary of State for the Home Department, it is understood, through Dr Thomson's *political* interest. He has filled that Chair for three or four years, and lectured eighteen or at most twenty-four months. Now, I appeal to any party, or to any impartial man, if, under these circumstances, Dr Thomson be entitled to a pension, and, least of all, to one from the source from which it is proposed to be levied,—from the students; and that, too, by compelling them to throw away their money, and waste their still more valuable time, in attending a class which the Professors have denounced as unnecessary,—nay, which they expressly declare for instruction paid for to other teachers within the walls of the University.

“ It is no relief of this unparalleled grievance that the fee required will be small. It must be two guineas at least; and those who are acquainted with the slender finances of many of our medical students, must be aware that an *unnecessary* exaction even to that amount is an oppression. Sir Astley Cooper, after he had realised a princely fortune by the exercise of his splendid professional talents, was, to his honour, in the habit of mentioning, at his introductory lectures, that he remembered the time when, as a student, a shilling was an object of importance to him. But the evidence of our Professors themselves affords unquestionable proof of the ungenerous nature of their plan. When examined by the Commissioners in 1830, the evidence referred to was elicited, and is recorded in the following words: ‘ There are also many in straitened circumstances; and the evidence as to Edinburgh agrees with that afforded at all the other Universities, that, owing to the failure of means, a proportion of the students are stated by the Professors to be obliged to leave the College a considerable time before the end of the session; and that this is so irremediable, that certificates are granted on the 1st of April, as if the attendance had been regular and complete *.’

* See Report of the Commissioners appointed to visit the Universities and Colleges of Scotland, page 162.

“ It is to be hoped that Dr Thomson will not wish to compel the Patrons of the University to adopt any measure, obviously unjust, to provide him with a retiring allowance ; but if he should, they have a remedy in their power, which they may adopt with perfect propriety. Councillor Bruce, who is a lawyer, and who seems very anxious to satisfy himself as to the merits of medical men, has expressed his opinion, that the Council are judicially entitled to make a class imperative or not, as they deem it expedient,—a power with which it is proper they should be invested,—and in the judicious exercise of which, I can foresee great advantage to the medical profession. Its applicability to the present occasion is so important, that it may relieve the Council of the perplexity in which they are involved, without doing injustice to any party, simply by continuing the Pathology Chair, without making it imperative, during Dr Thomson’s lifetime, or until the Patrons can satisfy themselves of the propriety of merging its duties in that of the Chair of Clinical Medicine. Were the Pathological Chair not compulsory, no person would have any right to complain of its existence ; and *then* the Professors might teach that class in addition to their own * ; although, as I said before, the Council would certainly do well to get *one* proper person, if possible, to do that which the four Professors propose. Since the publication of my communication of the 14th instant, two pamphlets have issued from the press on the subject under consideration ; one from the pen of Dr Knox, the other anonymously. It was my intention to give an analysis of these productions, with the view of endeavouring to assist non-professional readers to form a more accurate opinion of their merits. But aware of the demands that will be made on your columns in the present agitated state of public affairs, I must not encroach farther, but shall probably execute my design in another and more appropriate place than the pages of a newspaper afford for the discussion which the remaining part of my task demands. Allow me, however, to mention, that Dr Knox agrees with me in declaring the Professors’ proposal to be absurd, or something that is worse, and that he has made many remarks deserving the serious consideration of the Town-Council. The author of the anonymous publication referred to has also written to the purpose ; and his ‘ argu-

* I find myself in error in saying so, as it would vitiate the tickets of two of them as valid medical certificates.

ments' against the adoption of the plan proposed for carrying on the duties of the Pathological Chair are, I think, conclusive.

"In taking leave of you, Sir, on this occasion, allow me to thank you cordially for the space you have so readily allowed in your paper for the insertion of my communications on this subject, most assuredly one of great public importance. I have the honour to be," &c.

"July 24. 1837.

PHILO IATROS."

In my last communication to the Editor of the Observer, I promised an analysis of Dr Knox's publication on the Pathological Chair, and of the anonymous one, entitled, "ARGUMENTS against the Adoption of the Plan proposed by the Professors for carrying on the duties of the PATHOLOGICAL CHAIR during the lifetime of Dr THOMSON."

Dr Knox agrees with me, as already observed, in declaring the Professors' proposal to be absurd, or something worse; and, in few words, has said much that is highly deserving of the most serious consideration of the Town-Council. The points to which I would respectfully direct their attention are the facts stated by Dr Knox, that the mere *creation* of University Chairs is not in itself an oppressive act: it is the rendering such Chairs imperative, and enrolling the holders thereof among the list of University Examinators, which makes the act oppressive.

The time, I am convinced, is not far distant when no such vitious monopoly* as that enjoyed, and pertinaciously, I had almost said rapaciously, held by the Professors of the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow, contrary to the example of Oxford, Cambridge, Aberdeen and St Andrews, as well as of the Medical Military and Naval Boards, who insist, it is true, on an excellent practical medical education on the part of all candidates for professional honours and medical appointments, but care little as to where these are acquired,—whether, to refer to localities familiar to us all, within the walls of our College, or in Argyle or Surgeons' Square, or in Roxburgh Place. The Town-Council unquestionably would do well, as Patrons of our University, to take the points referred to, into immediate

* The monopoly referred to is a *compulsory* attendance on the lectures of particular individuals, without the least regard to their merits as teachers,—payment of a certain number of fees to particular colleges, &c. &c.!

and serious consideration. But to return to the more immediate object of Dr Knox's pamphlet. He wishes to prove that the Chair of Pathology, if retained, must become one of Pathological Anatomy merely. In this I am diametrically opposed to him in opinion,—if, by the term, he means to exclude from the duties of the Professor the comparing the symptoms of disease during life with the morbid appearances discovered in the body after death, keeping in view the nature and effects of remedies that may have been employed. A mere physician, as has been observed by Dr Mackintosh, cannot perform the duties of this Chair, neither can a mere anatomist, however eminent each may be in his different calling.

The acuteness of Dr Knox's feelings makes this discussion concerning Dr Thomson's pension exceedingly painful to him, and he pathetically beseeches you to put an immediate stop to it; adding, “of this I am sure, that any proposal couched in the language used by the reporters would have been immediately put down in the corporate body to which I have the honour to belong, who, should the University find a difficulty of meeting the exigency, will step forward in aid of one of their most distinguished, and, I may also add, one of their most esteemed and respected members.”

It is impossible not to admire the generous magnanimity which, Dr Knox informs us, exists in the corporate body (the College of Surgeons) to which he belongs. Here is a prospect of relief to the Town-Council, which, I presume, they little flattered themselves would present itself. I would rejoice to see it realised. Truly, the source referred to is an infinitely more proper one than the pockets of the students. Judging from the influence Dr Thomson is always understood to have exercised in the College of Surgeons, it is reasonable to suppose they must be under obligations to him of no common kind: of this, if I be not greatly mistaken, we have substantial proof, in a Government grant, which they obtained within the last few weeks, of no less a sum than L.5000. This donation they received in consideration of the great expense incurred by them in forming a magnificent Museum, which, to their great honour, they have most liberally made as extensively available as possible to the interests of science.

Nothing is further from my intention, than, in the prosecution of a scientific investigation, to make any political

allusion ; but it is impossible, in adverting to this munificent act, not to make a comparison between the enlightened generosity of the present Government, in this respect, and of one which acted very differently.

“ It is painful,” says a writer in one of our most respectable medical periodicals of the present month, “ to look back on the difficulties which both the Hunters experienced in rousing the feelings of the English public to any demonstration of zeal for science. William Hunter offered, at one time, to lay out L.7000 in the foundation of a National Museum, but could get no countenance from Government ; and John’s unrivalled collection, after his death, and the usual miserable process of bargaining, was purchased for less than half its value, and placed where it was long of little advantage to the profession or the public. The warlike ministry of that season of national insanity were astonished at a request to encourage science. ‘ What,’ exclaimed Mr Pitt, ‘ buy preparations ! Why, I have not money enough to buy gunpowder.’ No encouragement would be afforded to the sciences which preserve life, by those whose thoughts were chiefly turned to the most compendious methods of killing men. We have no reason to be proud when we recollect that the French Government, though equally steeped in human blood, was at that time fostering science with the utmost care, and rewarding its professors with unexampled liberality.”

In Dr Knox himself we have a striking example of the character, that of a special pleader, which, in his P.S., he attempts sarcastically to condemn. The University of Edinburgh, according to him, owes “ the very basis ” of its “ vast reputation ” to the system adopted there of teaching clinical medicine. This I decidedly deny, and aver, that the reputation of our University rests on a very different and much more stable foundation. The system alluded to by Dr Knox is one of the same kind, although not quite so extensive as that which *once* existed in the Surgical Department of the Royal Infirmary, so graphically described by the late Professor Gregory. “ All the surgeons,” said he, “ old and young, learned and ignorant, drunk and sober, had a right to have his cut.” It surely requires no argument to prove that that system cannot be good, by which the duty of delivering lectures on clinical medicine may be undertaken “ by such of the Professors as *choose* to undertake the duty in rotation,” which includes nine or

ten individuals, amongst whom are the incumbents of the Anatomical, Chemical, Botanical and Medical Jurisprudence Chairs.

I am no advocate for the system which makes the Chair of Clinical Medicine, or any Chair, imperative; but I maintain it would be a vast improvement on the present system of teaching that most important department of medical science,—ay, and of treating the sick poor in the wards of the Royal Infirmary too, were the Patrons of the University and the Managers of the Hospital to require that no one did either who could not produce ample proof of being eminently possessed of the requisite qualifications—qualifications with which a Professor of Chemistry or Botany, (I of course make no personal allusions,) or, indeed, of any other department of medical science, is not necessarily endowed. But, in point of fact, Dr Knox's "special pleader" is not the individual who proposed the alteration on the system of teaching clinical medicine. *That* was done by the Commissioners appointed to visit the Universities. In the Appendix to their General Report it is stated, page 190: "At present this Chair (Clinical Medicine) is taught at different times, by four separate teachers. There is a danger that such a number may not at the same time have equal qualifications for this most important department; and if matters could be so arranged, it would seem preferable that it should be assigned to a separate Chair, and that thus the attention of one Professor, chosen with all the care which is imperiously demanded, should be devoted to it. Referring to this subject, Dr Davidson remarks, 'In place of the present system, I cannot help thinking, that the appointment of a Clinical Professor, or perhaps better, of two Professors, permanently attached to the Hospital, would be a very important improvement in the plan of clinical instruction in the University. Such a Professor might continue to act, as at present, in the Infirmary, or have a separate Hospital. The Professor of Clinical Medicine should devote much of his time to the wards under his care, and should lecture frequently, so that he may point out to the students the important, but often transient, changes in diseases. He should have frequent examinations of the students upon the nature of the cases which they witness; upon the motives for particular practice, with the distinguishing symptoms and probable termination of the complaints; and he should insist upon full and

accurate descriptions of the morbid appearances discovered after death. I suspect that we must ascribe to the want of a permanent Professor of Clinical Medicine the dearth of reports in Scotland, whilst these most useful of all medical publications abound in France, Germany and Italy.’”

With these observations on the accuracy of Dr Knox’s ungenerous remarks concerning a special pleader and as to his knowledge of the best system of teaching clinical medicine, I take leave of this well-known anatomist, and now proceed to consider the “ Arguments,” published anonymously, against the adoption of the plan proposed by the Medical Professors of the University of Edinburgh, for carrying on the duties of the Pathological Chair, during the lifetime of Dr Thomson.

These arguments contain internal proof of being the work of one intimately acquainted with the weak condition of his adversary’s case ; but evince marks of being hurriedly written, without, however, being less conclusive against the plan of the Professors, and prove,

1st, That there is no generosity in their proposal :

2d, That the scheme of the Professors cannot work well :

3d, That, if carried into execution, the interests of the students will be sacrificed :

4th, That if the Town-Council agree to the Professors’ proposal, the University as well as the students must be injured :

And, 5th, That the Medical Professors have always been the worst advisers of the Patrons of the College.

In illustration of the last conclusion, the author quotes a letter signed by five of them, recommendatory of an appointment, which he leads us to believe has been inimical to the interests of the University.

He might, I conceive, have more satisfactorily proved the aptitude of their advice to injure the fair fame of the University, by a reference to the recorded opinion of one Professor as to his idea of the requisite qualifications of candidates for a medical degree, and *that* opinion approved of by the Medical Faculty, (meaning, be it always remembered, in Scottish academical phraseology, the Medical Professors,) with the exception of the late Dr Duncan, whose dissent from it, however, as we shall find, did not redeem him *professorially*, from the merited censure of our anonymous author, as holding and promulgating, in com-

mon with his brethren, heterodox opinions, and, of course, opinions prejudicial to the best interests of medical science.

I anticipate the amazement—perhaps, indignant incredulity—with which this charge will be received by your Lordship and the Council, and the demand that will instantly be made for the proof of its justice. It is easily adduced. *Scriptæ literæ manent*, and a commentary on them too, by men whose judgment few, I believe, will be inclined to question *. At page 187 of the Report of the University Commissioners it is written :

“ It would seem a matter about which all might be agreed, that it is desirable that medical practitioners should be men of enlightened minds, accustomed to exert their intellectual powers, and familiar with habits of accurate observation and cautious reflection. It is also desirable that they should have that degree of literary attainment which will prevent them, when mingling as they must do with mankind in the exercise of their profession, from being looked upon with contempt, or from committing errors in conversation and in writing, for which others would be despised : because, even upon the supposition that, notwithstanding this, they have high professional acquisition, the law of association will operate, and the conclusion will be drawn, that much confidence cannot be placed in them. This tendency not to confide in him is one of the most formidable difficulties with which a physician has to struggle ; much, unquestionably, of the success of ordinary practice depending upon the feelings of trust and security with which he is regarded. There is, too, a connexion between the sciences, the cultivation of one certainly predisposing or at least creating a facility for the cultivation of another. And with a view to the general dissemination of knowledge, it would be of moment that a class of men so widely diffused, and mingling so much with society as the members of the medical profession, should be so instructed as to be able to give a tone to conversation, or to promote among those with whom they associate the love and pursuit of li-

* I refer to the Commissioners appointed to examine the Universities, viz. the late Duke of Gordon, Earls Haddington, Aberdeen and Rosebery, Viscount Melville, the Lord President, the Honourable C. Hope, Sir William Rae, the Lord Justice-Clerk Boyle, Lords Corehouse and Moncreiff, John Hope, Dean of Faculty, Thomas Taylor, George Cook, and H. Home Drummond.

terary and scientific accomplishments. But after granting all this, the question still remains, whether there should be, before commencing the study of medicine, or while that study is pursued, the acquisition of what is commonly called a learned education; and it is as to this that most intelligent men of medical proficiency are not agreed. Dr Alison submitted to us a paper relating to this subject, which had been read over to the Medical Faculty, and approved of by them; so that, he says, that he considered it to be their opinion, as well as his own; all assenting to it except the late Dr Duncan, who was understood to hold notions which did not agree with it. This paper advocates the side of the question which is unfavourable to high literary acquirements; and there are two principal grounds upon which the pleading is rested. It lays down, that ‘experience does not entitle us to say that the skill of physicians is by any means in proportion to their attainments in general literature and science.....In fact, we may safely assert, that the talents and habits of mind by which great and varied acquisitions of literature and science are made, and which a long-continued course of such study is calculated to form, are very different from those attainments by which the most judicious practitioners are distinguished.....Every medical man has besides to acquire habits of business, observation of mankind, and a knowledge of the world. These acquirements of themselves make up to many medical men for the want of scientific knowledge, but the knowledge of all the sciences cannot make up to them for the want of those; and in general, I believe, we may say, that the habits of a student who has gone through a very long and varied course of literature and science, are not those which will fit a man for that kind of intercourse with the world by which a physician must live.’

“The amount of this would seem to be, that literature is a positive evil to a physician; that it unfits him for the habits and state of mind which he ought to cultivate; and that it will be an obstacle to his success in practice. It is difficult to conceive that the learned Medical Faculty could have intended to go so far as this; but it is plain that there is much fallacy in the assertions, for it can scarcely be called reasoning, which they here adduce. It is unquestionably true, that if a man were to devote himself, in the manner stated, to literature and science, making these the chief, or almost the exclusive objects of his

pursuit, he would not be a good physician : but this is not at all what is intended ; the sole object being, that a physician should have that liberal education which is implied in a course of University attendance. By acquiring this, the mind would be invigorated for any intellectual pursuit; and it could superinduce no habit disqualifying for the activity of exertion, or for mingling in society as a medical man must do. Such education also, it is to be remembered, would be completed, or nearly so, before medical pursuits commenced, certainly long before practice was attempted, and would not therefore have the effect which is here supposed.

“ But there is a different reason assigned for not making the standard of education, previously to entering upon the study of physic, or even to conferring a degree in it, very high. ‘ There are other degrees,’ Dr Alison proceeds to observe, ‘ such as diplomas to surgeons and apothecaries, which are obtained by a less expensive education than that which is given in the University, and on which a great number of medical men practise all branches of the profession in all parts of the country with success and reputation. Unless it can be made quite clear that any additional qualifications which we demand will raise the value of the degree of our graduates in the eyes of the public, and increase, therefore, their chance of professional success, the effect of making our degree more difficult of attainment will only be to increase the proportion of medical men practising upon inferior degrees, and to lower rather than to elevate, upon the whole, the general average of the attainments of professional men.’

“ It is thus represented, that because, which is undoubtedly true, there are men who practise with little or no literary attainment, the general tone of the profession should be lowered, or at least that no attempt should be made to elevate it, because, the expense being thus increased, the number of enlightened graduates would be diminished, and practice would be surrendered, much more than it is, to those of inferior qualifications. But this reasoning is far from being conclusive. There is, it is to be lamented, too great a disposition in many to prefer quackery to sound medical science ; and by those who do so, the literature of medical men will not be held in much estimation. But as no one would contend that, on this account, quackery should be preferred to knowledge, upon the same ground it would

seem that want of literature should not be preferred to learning. In fact, the preparatory education for which some contend does not interfere in the slightest degree with the medical ; it only tends to make the practitioner a more enlightened man, and it is not easy to see how the acquisition of it should have the effect which Dr Alison and the Faculty assign to it. But the presumption is, that, upon the whole, the possession of it would prove an advantage, and would gain, among the thinking part of the community, a decided preference for those who enjoyed it. At present it is found, that although many may practise with inferior degrees, they consider it as an object to get the highest degree ; and this can arise solely from the conviction, that the having such a degree would increase their respectability and their practice. This fact is stated by Dr Alison. ‘ Of late years,’ he says, ‘ a much greater number than formerly of the general practitioners, both of this country and of England, have taken the medical degree in addition to their education as surgeons and apothecaries, and very often in addition to the degree of apothecary.’ This shews that the high degree is held in estimation, and it would be not less so, if it was the indication of general as well as of medical literature.

“ Dr Alison draws an opposite conclusion : he conceives that the facts which he states prove that the learning of the public is to practical rather than to literary or scientific attainments in medical men, and hence, ‘ that much caution is necessary in introducing a higher literary and scientific education into the Medical School here, and this with a view to the interests of the public fully as much as to the interests of the University itself.’ The extent to which education should be required, Dr Alison thus states : ‘ I may mention, that it appears to me there will be no objection—it could do no injury—perhaps there might be some benefit from requiring of our graduates in future, that they should shew that they studied not only Latin, which is required at present, as they are examined in Latin, but French, and I would say likewise Mathematics ; but I certainly would hardly consider it safe at present to require more to be done in this University or in any other.’

“ In these sentiments, as has been mentioned, the Medical Professors of Edinburgh concur, and they are strongly supported by Dr Duncan, who places the subject under somewhat of a different light. In answer to the question,

‘What particular objection occurs to you, to requiring evidence of having attended the Philosophical Classes in the Universities previously to taking the degree of medicine?’ he states, ‘The objection which occurs to me, and which is in my own mind quite conclusive against it, is, that a very large proportion of our graduates come from England and Ireland, where, during the period of their life before they begin their professional study, they have no means of attending those branches in a University, although they may acquire a moderate knowledge of them in schools, both public and private, and from their own private exertions. If we were to require evidence of their having attended them in Universities, in addition to the four years of professional study, the degree here could not be obtained without a residence of not less than six or eight years; the effect of which would be, that these gentlemen would take no degree at all*.’ These observations rather relate to the mode of acquiring literature, than to the point that it should not be acquired; but Dr Duncan, in his evidence, supports the propriety of an extremely moderate portion of it being held essential.

“It is unnecessary to allude further to the reasoning in support of the views of Dr Alison and the Medical Faculty.”

At page 64 of the same important document, under the head of Examinations for Medical Degrees, we have the following statement:

“The examinations for degrees in medicine have hitherto been conducted by the Members of the Medical Faculty, exclusive of the Professors of the medical classes recently instituted by the Crown, and each candidate has been required to pay a sum of ten guineas, which is divided equally among the examining Professors.

* And if they did not, what harm would arise to the community? None. The “large proportion,” it is true, would not be legally entitled to write M.D. after their names; and a “large proportion” of the graduation fees, which the Professors receive by acting on their favourite theory, would be lost to them; but that is all. The “large proportion of gentlemen” who did not obtain the degree of Doctor of Medicine would be as good practitioners, with merely their diplomas from the College of Surgeons. We would have the same number of students; but some of them would remain much longer at the University, and be more highly educated. The medical degree consequently would rank much higher than it has done lately in the estimation of the intelligent part of mankind.—R., L.

“ We are of opinion that this system is liable to very serious objections. The emoluments of the Professors who examine ought not to depend on the number of candidates for degrees. At present, the fees drawn by the several Professors from this source are very considerable, in consequence of the great number of candidates; and it appears from the evidence, that the number of degrees conferred has been continually increasing during many years, in a proportion much greater than corresponds to the rate of increase in the number of students attending the Medical School of Edinburgh.

“ No explanation has been given of this extraordinary increase in the number of degrees, and we are satisfied that it cannot be accounted for from any external causes. We are of opinion that the present system has a necessary tendency to render the examinations less strict than they might otherwise be, and practically to lower the standard of qualifications in the estimation of the Faculty. It is, besides, scarcely to be doubted, that there must be a natural reluctance in Professors to reject candidates, to many of whom the fees paid to the Examiners may be a very serious sacrifice. Although most of the Professors in the Medical Faculty entertain opinions adverse to any extension of the subjects of examination, and are strongly impressed with the idea that the importance and value of the University, as a school of medicine, ought to be estimated by the number of the degrees annually conferred, an entirely different opinion has been strongly expressed by all the other physicians and surgeons whom we have examined, being persons very extensively engaged in the practice of their profession. It should seem to us, that the value of the degree must bear a proportion to the nature of the qualifications required for it; and we have already observed, that it does not appear to us that either the reputation of the University as a school of medicine, or the number of students resorting to it for instruction, will be regulated merely by the number of those who may obtain degrees. It has never been found, in regard to objects of such importance in professional pursuits, that the risk of failure has tended in any degree to diminish the number of those endeavouring to qualify themselves for attaining them.”

I would also refer to the annexed remarks of the Report, page 60.

“ It is not immaterial to notice, with reference to the difficulty with which the most important improvements can be introduced, and to the contrast which may subsist between the opinions entertained, it may be said, by the whole profession of medicine, and the opinions of the teachers in the University themselves, that it is only within the last six years that attendance upon the class of midwifery was required by candidates for the medical degree in the University of Edinburgh, although that class had been included for some time in the curriculum of study in the University of Glasgow. Whether midwifery may be actually practised or not by the physician in after life, it is fully admitted by all, and now acknowledged by the University of Edinburgh, that an acquaintance with the subject, and with the great variety of complaints included under the head of midwifery, as well as with the treatment both of the female and the infant, is of essential importance in the education of those who are to practise medicine.

“ The exclusion of this class from the medical curriculum in the University of Edinburgh for so long a period, appears to us to be the more extraordinary, because it has been strongly and anxiously stated by the Medical Faculty, in opposition to many of the changes which we have proposed in the education of the candidates for the medical degree, that the degree of M. D. is and ought to be what is termed the working degree throughout the country, or, in other words, should be possessed by the great bulk of practitioners. Upon that principle, the exclusion of the class of midwifery appears to have been wholly at variance with the very objects for which the system of instruction is said to be designed.”

The last extract to which I shall direct your attention is to be found at page 57.

“ Taking, at the same time, a more general view of the subject, it has appeared to us, that unless a man has passed through a course of education, embracing in some reasonable degree all these departments of knowledge, there can be no security that he possesses the enlargement of understanding which is alike necessary to guard him against rashness of speculation in practice, and to preserve the correctness and delicacy of personal conduct which the

duties of a physician so peculiarly require *. And we are also of opinion, that as the degree of doctor in medicine obtained in a University, is a dignity conferred not by the Professors of medical science alone, but also by all the Professors of literature and philosophy, it would be inconsistent with the nature of such graduation that the distinction should be bestowed without any inquiry into the attainments of the persons receiving it in classical learning or philosophical science.

“ An idea seems to be entertained by persons of great respectability, that the character of Universities, as schools of medicine, is to be measured by the number of degrees which are conferred by them †, and that if any considerable extent of previous education were required, fewer persons would apply for them, licences to practise would be obtained elsewhere, and the number of students attending the Universities would be greatly diminished. But, while we should not be satisfied of the sufficiency of this objection, even though the principle of it were well founded, and humbly think that it would go far to sanction laxity of exa-

* The correctness of this opinion is doubted by none, except by the Medical Professors of Edinburgh and Glasgow. It would be interesting to hear the explanation of these gentlemen in regard to the well-known fact, of the preference given by the élite of London to Oxford and Cambridge degrees. The proper education of a graduate of the highest class in medicine undoubtedly should consist of a combination of the literary training practised at Oxford, or the mathematical at Cambridge, according to the natural bent of the student's mind, and of the medical and scientific knowledge which Edinburgh is so famous for imparting. To the public it is of no consequence *where* physicians are educated; but it is true—and a truth of vital importance to the welfare of this city,—that the requisite essentials of an accomplished physician's education may be acquired here as well as in any place in the British dominions. To accomplish this most desirable object, it is merely necessary that the Patrons of the University, the Professors within, and the Teachers without its walls, should do their duty. It is painful to add, that the Professors, or rather their selfish policy, is the great impediment to this consummation so devoutly to be wished.—R. L.

† An idea the very reverse is entertained by others of equal respectability, uninfluenced by any consideration to bias their judgment, who imagine that the value of academical degrees, like other honorary distinctions, is diminished by being too easily obtained. It should never be forgotten, that the number of students has no necessary connexion with the number of degrees granted by the University; and that a proper *working* degree may be, and actually is more frequently obtained from another quarter. So long as the curriculum of the College of Surgeons and that of the University is so similar, academical degrees will be rife; but the public will not be supplied with a better class of medical men. The mere circumstance of a person being legally entitled to write M. D. after his name, although it may gratify his vanity, does not make him a more trust-worthy practitioner.—R. L.

mination in general, we are of opinion, that it is not correct in principle, or at all supported by experience. It appears to us that the reputation of a University does not depend on the *number* of the degrees which are granted by it, but must depend entirely on the nature of the qualifications which the possession of such degrees implies in the persons on whom they are conferred; and, being satisfied of the truth of this proposition, we see no good ground for thinking, that, by raising the value of the degree in medicine in the Scotch Universities, we shall thereby lessen the demand for it: on the contrary, the only consequences which we can anticipate from any regulations reasonably laid down for this object are, that the students will come to the study of medicine better prepared to profit by the instructions they receive, and that there will be a more general desire to obtain a degree in these Universities, when it has thus been rendered the more sure introduction to professional success or eminence."

How far it has been proved that the Professors in the University are not the most proper persons to advise the Town-Council in regard to academical arrangements, I now leave for the determination of your Lordship and the Councillors. To supersede the necessity of giving my own opinion at length on the point at issue, I have preferred delivering that of the learned Commissioners, which rendered it necessary for me to quote largely from their Report—a document which I would respectfully recommend every Councillor to study with devout attention. I have only to add, in reference to the opinions and practices of the Professors, that the sentiments of the Commissioners confirmed in my mind the belief, which has long existed in the minds of others,—but which I was slow to entertain, that the Medical Faculty, in regulating the curriculum of study, have been more influenced by a regard to their own private interest than to that of the students, or to the reputation of the University. The *auri sacra fames* has been the governing principle.

Dr William Thomson has just published a pamphlet, addressed to the Fellows of the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons, with the view of proving that the Chair of Pathology should be continued. It is natural to imagine that he supposes such a Chair ought to exist. From the hurried glance I have been able to give his publication,

there appears to me to be no validity in the arguments in support of his opinion. Dr William Thomson, in his first page, speaks of the possibility of the "point at issue" being still referred to the two learned Colleges. With your acute Treasurer, Mr Maclaren, I agree that that ought not *now* to be done, although there was a time when such a measure might have been proper and advantageous. A motion to that effect was made by myself in the College of Physicians five years ago, which, however, was not entertained; and, as I have said before, the College of Surgeons gave no encouragement to the discussion of this question.

I observe, by a report of the proceedings of the last meeting of the Town-Council, that Drs Shortt and Borthwick, Physicians of the Royal Infirmary, and Lecturers on Clinical Medicine, have memorialised them to be pleased to order that the tickets of the ordinary Clinical Physicians of the Infirmary shall be of equal force with those of the Professors; or, if it shall appear more simple and equally conducive to justice, that the Council will constitute the ordinary Physicians of the Infirmary Professors of Clinical Medicine for the time being.

The request of the memorialists, so far as wishing to have testimonials of attendance on their lectures recognised as valid certificates by the *Senatus Academicus*, is most just and reasonable. To constitute them *Clinical Professors*, however, in virtue of their appointments in the Royal Infirmary, I may confidently assert, would be improper. That would in fact be giving the patronage of professorships of Clinical Medicine to the managers of the Infirmary, who, it is generally admitted, dispense the patronage which they already possess in the most unsatisfactory manner of any corporate body in the kingdom. But, assuredly, Drs Shortt and Borthwick, and all gentlemen similarly situated, have just cause of complaint against the *Senatus Academicus*. An investigation of the effects resulting from the refusal, by the Medical Professors of the University, to recognise the lectures delivered by other qualified teachers*, will, I trust, soon result from the agitation of this subject, when it will be found

* By the term "qualified teachers," I mean those whose lectures are recognised by all Colleges and legally constituted Medical Boards in the kingdom, with the exception of the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow.

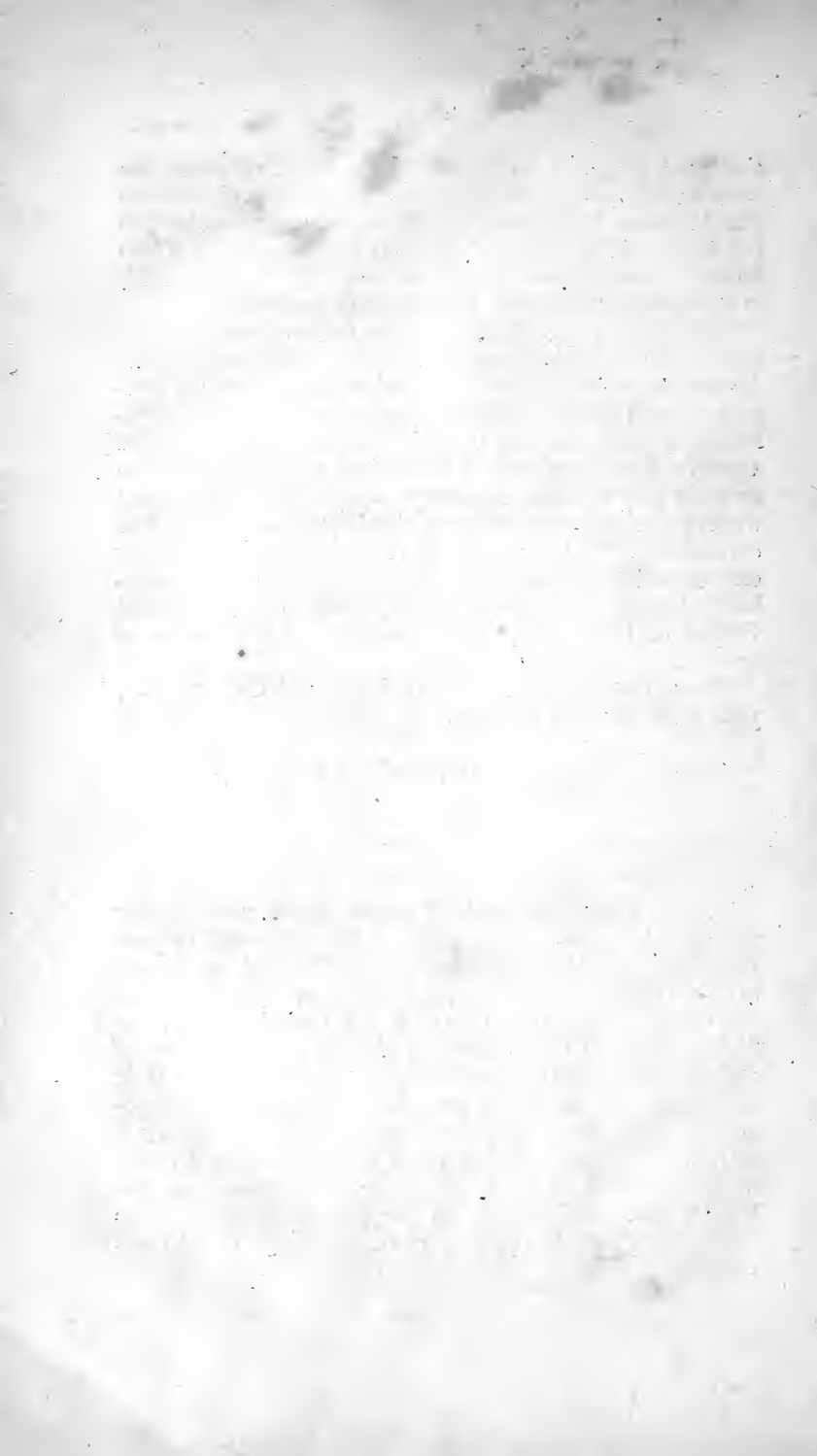
that such power as is possessed by the Professors has been greatly abused, and has been rendered prejudicial to the interests of science, to those of extra-academical teachers, and to those of the city itself, which it is the bounden duty of your Lordships and the Town-Council, in your official situations, to foster and protect.

In conclusion, permit me, as a professional man, to suggest, with the highest sense of respect, and profound deference, that if a professorial appointment be made at present, there is not the slightest occasion to go beyond the precincts of your own city to find a proper person to fill the Chair. You have several individuals as well qualified to do so as may be found in Europe ;—men whose names and works are known wherever medicine is practised, or science cultivated. We have, indeed, reason to be proud of our extra-academical Lecturers, some of whom have contributed largely to maintain the reputation of the Medical School of Edinburgh, and to extend the boundaries of science.

I have the honour to be, MY LORD and GENTLEMEN,
your most obedient Servant,

ROBERT LEWINS, M. D.

P. S.—Whilst the last of these sheets was passing through the press, I have seen a letter addressed to your Lordship, the Magistrates and Town-Council, in regard to the Chair of Pathology, by Professor Syme. I have only time to say, that I leave it for your Lordship, the Magistrates and Councillors, to decide on the wisdom of the Medical Faculty, in selecting Professor Syme as their champion, and as to the propriety and justice of his remarks, which are almost, in substance, if not in words, exactly what I heard uttered, some five years ago, by one, whose advocacy of his brethren's "frail" cause, but not "petty interests," would, on the present occasion, have been, in my humble opinion, more becoming, if not more effectual.





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